

TOPAZ



There are many art objects from the camps made from wood or other available materials. But few were made from metal like this 10" high flower vase (cast iron with a concrete bottom) that was likely a sewer pipe. Created in Topaz, Utah in 1943, at least three nearly identical vases exist. How was it done?

There was a machine shop at Topaz, and a forge, too, according to Jane Beckwith of the Topaz Museum. Based on the raised nature of the metal surface where the 'cuts' appear, it is very likely that the artisan used a hammer, chisel, punch and similar tools to create the shapes and lines... somewhat akin to the Egyptian cuneiform clay tablets. It may have been heated to soften the metal, too.

A name is inscribed on the vase; Michiyuki Enomoto. But Michiyuki does not appear to have been incarcerated in Topaz or any of the other camps. Was he the artist? If he was, it's a mystery how his name got onto the vases. Or like some artists in Japan, did he use his 'artist's name' instead of his real one?

Among the most common motifs found in Japanese art is the **Nightingale in the Ume Tree**. It was an historic folk tale written by an unknown author around 1119. The tale was illustrated in 1795 or 1796 by Ukiyo-e artist Kitao Shigemasa (1739-1820) as Ōshukubai, the Heian period tale of the Nightingale in the Plum Tree, and became greatly loved by the Japanese people for its simple, beautiful message.

Vase courtesy Amy Tomine. Thanks to Keith Nomura, Jane Beckwith, Jim Nagareda and especially Leon Kimura for their assistance with this story.

1943



Flower vase made of cast iron, with a concrete bottom from Topaz, Utah, 1943. About 10 inches high and about four lbs. At least three copies of the vase exist, each is just slightly different from the others. Artist unknown.